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ANACONDA Industries

by mel ruder

Montana Became Aluminum Producer 25 Years Ago

This census year of 1980 marks the 25th anniversary of Montana becoming an aluminum producer.

Completed 25 years ago were the first two potlines of the Anaconda Aluminum Co. plant two miles east of Columbia Falls.

Monday, August 15, 1955 saw dedication ceremonies with 5,500 taking the guided tours and 2,500 attending the attending the program.

Dedication speaker was Cornelius F. Kelley, chairman of Anaconda's executive committee and chairman of the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. board of directors from 1940 until 1955. Welcoming address was by Montana's Governor J. Hugo Aronson.

Roy H. Glover, chairman of the Anaconda board of directors, said in his address: "Every possible political string was pulled in an effort to prevent construction of the new Anaconda Aluminum Co. plant..... finally President Harry S. Truman intervened and direct development of the plant be permitted to proceed." Glover reviewed difficulties of establishing an aluminum plant in Montana and keeping Hungry Horse power in the state.

Robert E. Dwyer, Anaconda president, told the crowd and radio audience that Anaconda "has attempted to fulfill its full

share in demand for expansion of the metals industry."

He referred to the plant "providing a substantial and stable year around payroll to this area which would materially benefit these communities and the state as well."

Glover told of entering the aluminum field being a new experience for Anaconda who knew nothing about producing aluminum save what is common knowledge, "and knowing that we knew nothing we of necessity started from scratch."

Kelly spoke of the staff gaining information in the United States and in Europe and finally in Southern France "found what we were looking for." (This was the Pechiney process.)

ACM's veteran board chairman continued: "Anaconda again has pioneered in this way for the erection of the most modern, the safest, most efficient plant in existence (in 1955) with the best working conditions."

He referred to "to genesis of this undertaking was availability of power, so therefore it lies in the melting snows that cover yonder mountains," and mention was made of Hungry Horse Dam as "one of the greatest concrete dams built by man."

In his welcoming remarks, Governor Aronson congratulated the Anaconda Company on its foresight in locating in the Flathead, and said: "Five or six (Montana) counties have mountains a little higher, one or two are a few miles wider, but none in this state is more handsome than the Flathead."

When he retired as governor in 1961, Aronson with his

wife and daughter moved to a home they purchased in Bigfork.

R. B. Caples, president of Anaconda Aluminum Co. presided. The Rev. John Cronin of St. Charles Catholic Church, Whitefish, asked the invocation, with benediction by the Rev. L. D. Peck of Kalispell's First Baptist Church, president of the Kalispell Ministerial Association.

Countywide committee working with H.G. Satterthwaite, plant manager, on the dedication included Chet Seymer, Columbia Falls; Clark Mason, Kalispell; and Harry Burr, Whitefish.

Participating in the program was Columbia Falls High School Band under direction of Bill Bruey.

The bright, blue sky day of August 15, 1955 in the mountain cradled Flathead started with tours through the new \$65 million plant.

Morning hours saw 110 groups of 25 taken through the works, and then at 2 p.m. the dedication ceremony was followed by additional tours with 114 groups going through the plant.

Helping park cars were members of the Columbia Falls based Rocky Mountain Riders Saddle Club.

Among those introduced at the program was Edward Manix of Nichols Wire and Aluminum Co., Davenport, Iowa. This firm placed the first order for aluminum shortly after construction started in 1953.

Box lunches and refreshments were served. At the start of the program small aluminum ingots with "Anaconda" on one

side and "Columbia Falls, Mont., August 15, 1955" on the other were given visitors. Also provided were descriptive leaflets on the plant and programs.

August 17, 1955 saw the AF of L Aluminum Workers petition the National Labor Relations Board for an election to certify the AF of L as the bargaining agent at the new plant.

Patrick J. Reilly, Sr., union representative and a vice president of Aluminum Workers International, said more than 75 percent of production workers at the new plant had signed up with the AF of L.

The plant started metal output and had over 340 of its 450 operations employees.